


Government of Western Australia  
Department for Child Protection


## Supporting Children living with Parental Mental Illness in Schools

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## A little introduction



## What do you want to know...?



- Prevalence of Mental Illness and Parenting
- Causes of Mental Illness – Bio-psychosocial Model
- Most Common Mental Illnesses in Parents
- Potential Impact of PMI on Children – What to look out for.
- Keeping Children Safe – Working with Child Protection
- Supporting Children & Families – Services & Resources

## What is Mental Health ?



The diagram illustrates a spectrum of mental health. A horizontal double-headed arrow is shown. Above the left end is a red minus sign (-), and above the right end is a green plus sign (+). Below the arrow, three points are marked: 'Severe Mental Illness' on the left, 'Moderate–Mild Mental Illness' in the center, and 'Mental Health' on the right.

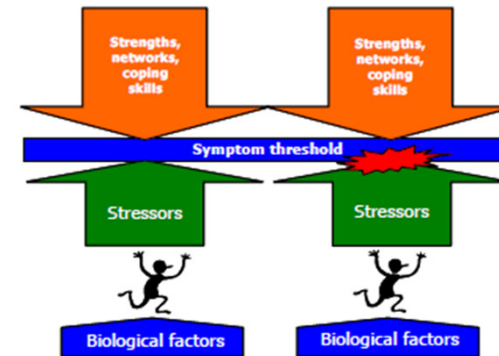
## Stress Vulnerability Model



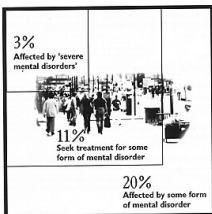
- i) Born with genetic predisposition (sensitivity) to develop mental health problems
- ii) Predisposition + significant environmental stress (eg abuse, car accident, loss, domestic violence, drug misuse etc) can result in the development of a mental illness.

(Genetic sensitivity may not develop into mental illness if no significantly stressful experiences)

## Stress Vulnerability Model



Perspectives (Ruah Mental Health)



## Prevalence of Mental Illness

One in Five - 20% each year

45% of Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime

(Reupert, Maybery & Kowalenko, 2012)

Approx 3% of population have a serious mental illness (eg. Schizophrenia, Bipolar, Severe Depression)

(Dept. for Families & Communities, SA, 2011)

## Prevalence of Parental Mental Illness



Up to 1 in 5 young people in Australia lives with a parent with a mental illness

(Reupert, Maybery, Kowalenko, 2012)

23.3% of Australian children live in a family with parental mental illness.

1% of these have a parent with a severe condition.

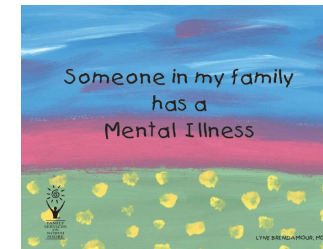
(Maybery et al, 2009)

## Most Common Mental Illnesses in Child Protection Context

Bromfield et al (2010)

Clinical Depression  
Borderline Personality Disorder  
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder  
Bipolar Disorder  
Schizophrenia  
Antisocial Personality Disorder

## Impact of Parental Mental Illness on Children



## Potential Impact of Parental Mental Illness on Children



As a group, children being raised by parents experiencing mental health difficulties have been observed to

- be at greater risk of developing a mental health problem (Weissman et al, 1997; Zubrick et al, 1995)
- display more behavioural, developmental & emotional problems (Beardslee et al, 1998; VanDeMark et al, 2005)
- be more likely to experience abuse (Andrews et al, 1990, Taylor et al, 1991)

## Potential Impact of Parental Mental Illness on Children



**Parental Mental Illness  
DOES NOT NECESSARILY  
result in child protection concerns**

*"The risk of harm children is associated with the parent's behaviour not their diagnosis"*

*Impact varies according to the "type and severity of mental illness, it's chronicity and the age and vulnerability of the child"*

(Cowling, 1999, p.17).

### Attachment between parent/primary carer & child



### Potential Impact of Parental Mental Illness on Children



Impact on children is dependent on

- i) Type & Severity of Illness (eg. severe and chronic)
- ii) Available Treatment & Support (eg. in treatment)
- iii) Individual Characteristics of Parents (eg. insight)
- iv) Social Environment & Family Context (eg. other carer)
- v) Child Characteristics (eg. age of child)

(Keeping the Child in Mind, Dept for Families & Communities, SA, 2011)

### Parent factors that may increase risk to children

- Comorbid substance abuse
- Presence of domestic violence in the home
- Increased severity of symptoms of mental illness
- Chronicity and constancy of mental illness
- Parent not responsive/adherent to treatment
- Rapidly changing mental states
- Aggressive, violent or self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- Poor insight into mental illness
- Inclusion of child in psychotic behaviour

(Adapted from Ostler, 2008, p.79)

### Behaviour Associated with Mental Illness That May Impact on Parenting



- Withdrawn – limited stimulation/socialisation for children
- Emotionally Unavailable – attachment/relationship problems
- Critical or Emotional – fear, anxiety, shame, emotional harm?
- Disorganised/Inconsistent – limited boundaries or routines.
- Forgetful or Distracted – confusion, neglect?
- Tired or Lethargic – poor relationship or socialisation, neglect?
- Tense or Anxious – fear, parentified-child, emotional harm?
- Substance Misuse – exposure to adult behaviour or neglect?

(Adapted from Mowbray (2000) in Bromfield et al , 2010)

## HIGH RISK

Co-existence of :  
**Parental Mental Illness**  
**Substance Misuse**  
**Domestic Violence**

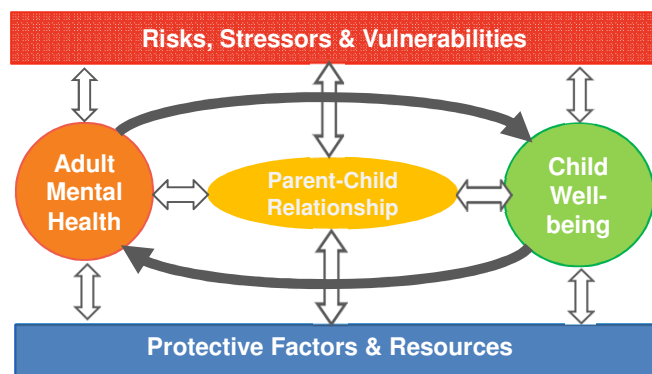
Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, Vic, Aust. (2012)

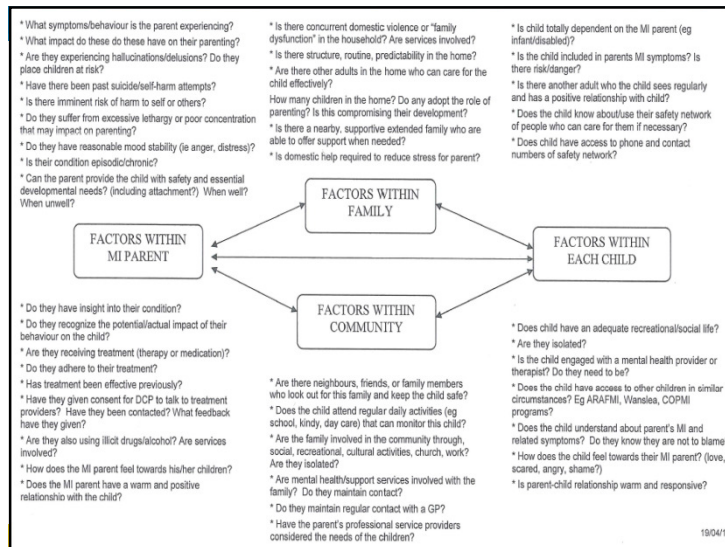
Variables associated with positive child outcomes:

- mother's health
- availability of health-related services
- positive health-related maternal behaviours (eg. Smoking, drinking, drug use)
- lack of material hardship
- supportive marriage and social support
- higher levels of social & demographic characteristics
- older age of the child
- later onset of the illness.

Logan et al (2007) in Parents with Mental Health Issues, DOCS, 2008

Falkov's (1998) Family Model





## Family Mental Health Plan

### Components of a Family Mental Health Plan:

- \* the nature of the mental health problem
- \* typical symptoms noticeable in the parent
- \* early warning signs of illness onset
- \* what parental wellness looks like
- \* the strengths of the patient parent
- \* information about the children and any special needs
- \* specifies plans for the children if the parent becomes ill.

(adapted from Children of Parents with Mental Illness Best Practice Guide  
 (Draft), Vancouver Coastal Health)

SERVICES & RESOURCES IN WA

[www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au)  
[www.arafmi.asn.au](http://www.arafmi.asn.au)  
[www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au)  
[www.ruah.com.au/page/COPMI](http://www.ruah.com.au/page/COPMI)  
[www.wanslea.asn.au/family-services/copmi](http://www.wanslea.asn.au/family-services/copmi)  
[www.carerswa.asn.au/carers-wa-services/young-carers](http://www.carerswa.asn.au/carers-wa-services/young-carers)  
[www.mifa.org.au/mifwa](http://www.mifa.org.au/mifwa)  
[www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)  
[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

